

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 NEW DE 17445 010815Z

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3117

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AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

USLO PEKING

USUN NEW YORK 1947

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 17445

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: SHARP RHETORIC AT CONGRESS PARTY MEETING: WHY?

REF: NEW DELHI 17363

1. REFTEL AND PRECEDING MESSAGES HAVE REVIEWED THE UNEXPECTEDLY SHARP RHETORIC AIMED AT THE WEST (AND IMPLICITLY--AND OCCASIONALLY EXPLICITLY--AGAINST THE US) AT THE ALL-INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE SESSIONS IN CHANDIGARH THIS WEEK. WE BELIEVE THAT THE EXTENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S ACERBIC TONE ON FOREIGN POLICY AND HER TESTY DEFENSE AGAINST CHARGES THAT SHE WAS MOVING TO THE "RIGHT" WERE UNEXPECTED BY CONGRESS POLITICIANS AND PERSONS CLOSE TO THE PRIME MINISTER BEFORE THE MEEGINS, OR WE SUSPECT EVEN BY THOSE WHO DRAFTED THE ORIGINAL RESOLUTIONS FOR SUBMISSION TO THE MEETINGS.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 17445 010815Z

2. THE PM'S REFERENCE TO "RUMORS" OF A SHIFT AWAY FROM

THE "LEFT" CLEARLY REFERS TO A WIDE POLITICAL - AN INCREASINGLY PUBLIC - CONSENSUS OF WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY POLITICIANS FROM THE CPI TO THE "RIGHT WING" OF THE CONGRESS PARTY ITSELF. AS WE HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, IT IS BASED ON THE ACTIVITIES OF HER SON, SANJAY, HER APPROVAL OF A RIGHTWARD SHIFT IN THE YOUTH CONGRESS LEADERSHIP, DISCOURAGEMENT OF CONGRESS ATTENDANCE AT THE CPI-BACKED ANTI-FASCIST CONFERENCE IN PATNA IN EARLY DECEMBER, THE CHOICE OF NEW CABINET MEMBERS (AND THOSE DISMISSED), CONTINUING GOI STRESS ON "PROGMATIC" ECONOMIC POLICIES, AS WELL AS OTHER SIGNALS.

3. SINCE THE PM IS CERTAINLY AS AWARE OF ALL THIS AS WE (AND ALL CONGRESS POLITICIANS WE HAVE SEEN), WHY HAS SHE SUDDENLY (AND TO THE EVIDENT SURPRISE TO EVEN HER OWN PRIVATE SECRETARY, PROF. DHAR) LEAPED TO THE RHETORICAL "LEFT"?

4. WE HOPE TO BE ABLE TO DISCUSS THIS FURTHER WITH PERSONS AT THE CONGRESS SESSION WHEN AN EMBOFF GOES TO CHANDIGARH JANUARY 1. WE MAY CHANGE OUR VIEWS, BUT FOR THE MOMENT WE OFFER THE FOLLOWING THOUGHTS.

5. AS WE SUGGESTED IN NEW DELHI 17346, MRS. GANDHI UNFORTUNATELY PROMPTLY TURNS TO THE THEME OF "FOREIGN ENEMIES" WHEN SHE NEEDS TO JUSTIFY AND RATIONALIZE CONTROVERSIAL AND POTENTIALLY DIVISIVE POLITICAL MOVES SUCH AS POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS, EXTENSION OF THE EMERGENCY AND ALTERATIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION. WE SUSPECT SHE MAY ALSO HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE "RIGHTWARD" DRIFT IN RECENT MONTHS MAY HAVE GAINED TOO MUCH MOMENTUM IN RECENT WEEKS IN APPEARANCE AND REALITY AND THREATENED HER ABILITY TO BALANCE FACTIONS WITHIN THE CONGRESS. TO RESPOND, SHE COULD HAVE DECIDED TO JOLT THE "RIGHT" BY REEMPHASIZING THE OLD SOCIALIST, LEFTIST THEMES (WHOSE VERBIAGE, AS WE NOTED EARLIER, HAD BEEN VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED FROM THE DRAFT CONGRESS RESOLUTIONS SUBMITTED LAST WEEKEND TO THE CENTRAL WORKING COMMITTEE), THUS PULLING THE CPI AND IS CONGRESS SUPPORTERS AGAIN BACK INTO THE FOLD. WHETHER THIS WILL MEAN A CHANGE IN POLICY, OR WHETHER MS. GANDHI IS "TALKING LEFT" WHILE SHE CONTINUES TO "ACT RIGHT" REMAINS TO BE SEEN. MS. GANDHI THRIVES ON SURPRISE AND SHOCK AS A MEANS OF KEEPING ANY CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 NEW DE 17445 010815Z

PROSPECTIVE DISSIDENTS OFF BALANCE AND OF TESTING THE IMMEDIACY OF THEIR FALLING INTO LINE (E.G., FONMIN CHAVAN'S PROMPT REVERASL OF FIELD ON THE US BETWEEN LAST WEEKEND AND DEC. 30). FURTHER, MRS. GANDHI HAS BEEN SPEAKING EXTEMPORANEOUSLY AT THESE CONGRESS SESSIONS, AND LIKE HER FATHER, SHE WAXES HOT AND INTENSE BEFORE LARGE RESPONSIVE AUDIENCES. ONE RHETORICAL FLOURISH LEADS HER TO ANOTHER AND YET ANOTHER, AND HER OWN EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS EMERGE MORE VIVIDLY THAN THEY WOULD IN ANY CAREFULLY

PREPARED AND STRUCTURED ADDRESS. EMOTIONALLY, MRS. GANDHI HERSELF IS DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF THE WEST (AND ESPECIALLY THE US) AND DEEPLY "LEFTIST" IN THE GRANDOLD TRADITIONS OF THE LSE. HER PUBLIC PREFERENCE FOR "SOCIALISM" AND A LEFT LEANING NON-ALIGNMENT HAVE BEEN CENTRAL TO THE POLITICAL IMAGE SHE SEEKS TO CREATE,

DATING BACK TO HER 1966 ATTACK ON SHASTRI'S GOVERNMENT FOR DEVIATING FROM THESE TWO TENETS.

6. DOMESTICALLY, ALL THIS IS A CAUTION TO HER SON (WHO HAS FOLLOWED ALONG WITH SOME OF HIS OWN COMMENTS ABOUT "EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE" ON WHICH WE WILL REPORT SEPARATELY IN ROUNDING UP SANJAY'S ROLE AT THE CONGRESS SESSIONS), A CAUTION TO THE ANTI-CPI FACTION WITHIN THE CONGRESSPARTY, AND A GENTLE REASSURANCE TO THE CPI AND THE SOVIETS THAT INDIRA AND INDIA ARE NOT DRIFTING TOO FAR AWAY FROM THEIR OLD COURSE. IT IS, ALAS, ALSO A SIGNAL THAT DESPITE ALL WE HAVE SAID PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY, THE PM EITHER DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT INDO-US BILATERAL RELATIONS WILL BE AFFECTED BY HER RHETORIC, OR DOES NOT CARE. THERE ARE MANY WITHIN THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT WHO BOTH BELIEVE AND CARE, AND WE BELIEVE THEY HAVE URGED THEIR VIEWS STRONGLY ON THE PM. THEY DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE HAD MUCH IMPACT.

7. WE EXPECT WE WILL BE HEARING MUCH ADVISE TO IGNORE THE MURMURINGS OF POLITICIANS AND LOOK TO THE PRACTICAL ACTIONS OF THE GOI. WE ALSO EXPECT THAT WE WILL BE TOLD NOT TO BE SO SENSITIVE TO STATEMENTS, MANY OF WHICH MIGHT ALSO REFER TO OTHER COUNTRIES THAN THE US. WE EXPECT THAT THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY MAY ALSO BECOME MORE CAUTIOUS SINCE THE PM'S SOCIALIST RHETORIC COULD TO SOME EXTENT COUNTERBALANCE WHATEVER MINOR TREMORS OF ENCOURAGEMENT THE REFERENCES TO THE "PRIVATE SECTOR" THE CONGRESS DRAFT ECONOMIC RESOLUTION MAY HAVE PROVIDED.

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PAGE 04 NEW DE 17445 010815Z

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